NOISE

WE live in a world which is noisy and daily becoming noisier. Mechanical inventions of every kind are replacing hand labor, and most of them produce noises of varying degrees of intensity. Even the air is now inhabited by planes. The speed of the times requires work both at night and on Sundays.

With the exception of hospitals and schools and the so-called quiet zones, the average person has probably accepted these new noises as inevitable. During the past two years the matter of noise has gotten into the medical journals of several countries. The physician interested in the treatment of insane or neurotic individuals is perhaps more concerned than the average doctor, though the good effects of rest and sleep are well recognized in the treatment of all diseases.

In England the matter has recently been brought to a focus by a memorandum submitted to the Minister of Health by the British Medical Association.[1] While it is particularly desirable that the usual hours of sleep—say from 10 p.m. to 6 a.m.—should be kept quiet, it is obvious that many persons work at night and rest during the day. Healthy persons seem capable of adapting themselves to noises, though this costs something in the amount of energy which must necessarily be expended in inhibiting the undesirable stimuli. Where a noise is rhythmic and uniform in quality, pitch and intensity, the average person apparently bears it with little injury, but noises which are irregular in any of these qualities do serious injury.

No argument is needed to emphasize the importance of rest and quiet sleep. Health can be maintained only when these can be obtained. Those who are sick need all their strength for recovery. Neither the sick nor the well can afford to have their necessary rest disturbed, especially where the noises are of such an unnecessary and aggravating character as to produce emotions of reaction such as anger and irritation. In approximately 75 per cent of cases of mental breakdown, loss of sleep is either a symptom, or causes an aggravation of the basic difficulty, and, on the other hand, production of sleep is recognized as a means of prevention and even cure.[2]

Among the disturbing factors which stand out prominently are the horns of automobiles, motorcycles, exhausts without mufflers, trucks without pneumatic tires—especially those handling milk cans—engines blowing off steam, cars with flat wheels, and in towns, street cars with flat wheels and loose trucks. Conditions differ according to the locality, but everyone will recognize some of these noises wherever he may be.

Those who are "nervous" are doubtless prone to exaggerate the

intensity and the bad effects of noises, but there are probably few people, even in the smaller towns or along the highways of the country, who will not admit the unnecessary disturbances both during the hours normally allotted to rest and those devoted to labor.

The Minister of Health, who is a layman, gave a sympathetic hearing to the joint deputation from the British Medical Association and the People's League of Health, pointing out, however, that some definition of what constituted noise must be agreed upon, and suggesting further that studies should be made in factories, such as are already being carried out by the Industrial Fatigue Research Board. People certainly vary tremendously in their reaction to stimuli of various sorts. One must remember the reply of the artillery officer at a concert who was asked if he was fond of music. His reply was, "Yes, I like noise of any kind."

REFERENCES

1. *Brit. M. J.*, Supplement, Nov. 10, 1928, p. 1267.
2. *Brit. M. J.*, Dec. 8, 1928, p. 1053.